

VINTON
The Religious Theory
of Civil Government.

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DR. ALEX. H. VINTON'S

ELECTION SERMON.

1848.

THE RELIGIOUS THEORY OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE

His Excellency George N. Briggs,

GOVERNOR,

HIS HONOR JOHN REED,

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR,

THE HONORABLE COUNCIL,

AND

THE LEGISLATURE OF MASSACHUSETTS,

AT

The Annual Election, Wednesday, Jan. 5, 1848.

BY ALEXANDER H. VINTON,

¹¹
Rector of St. Paul's Church, Boston.

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1848.

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COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Jan. 6, 1848.

ORDERED, That Messrs. Crockett, of Boston, Thurber, of Plymouth, and Griswold, of Greenfield, be a Committee to present the thanks of the House to the Rev. Alexander H. Vinton, D. D., for the able discourse delivered by him, yesterday, before the government of the Commonwealth, and to request a copy thereof for publication.

CHARLES W. STOREY, CLERK.



INTRODUCTORY.

THE author of the following discourse would take the liberty of suggesting, that the theory of the divine origin of civil government, which is here maintained, is in no wise connected with the view entertained by many in the Episcopal Church, of the Apostolic succession of the Christian ministry. The distinction is sufficiently plain when we consider that the theory of the discourse refers to civil government merely as *an institution*, without regard to the person of the incumbent or the method of his appointment; while the theory of the "Apostolic succession" relates exclusively to the administrator himself, and the manner of his ordination. The civil theory derives the authority of the magistrate from the fact that God established a magistracy in civil affairs, and leaves all question of his appointment open and free. It therefore admits of any form of government, from Republicanism to Despotism. But the "Church Theory," so called, denies any authority in the ministry unless it be derived through a particular succession of individuals. It therefore admits of but one form of ecclesiastical government; and, in this respect, it resembles the theory advanced by Sir Robert Filmer, in defence of monarchy.

The former theory, therefore, refers to government as it is a general institution ; the latter, as it is a particular organization ; and the difference between them is the difference between an *ordinance* and an *ordination*.

Whatsoever, then, be the merits of either of these two theories, it is evident that they are not the same ; and ought not to be, as they have been, confounded.

Again ;—the view here taken of civil government as a divine institution has been charged as being identical with the union of Church and State. It will be plain to the reader that no such position is assumed in the discourse ; and it seems equally plain to me that the one proposition does not involve the other. It is not yet proved that a government cannot be religious without being sectarian. Until this is proved, whosoever objects to the theory on this ground does but quarrel with his own inference.

I make these remarks in order to disembarass a truth, which I deem momentous, from any extraneous subjects which might, by a confusion of thought, be entangled with it, and hinder its reception.

DISCOURSE.

Romans, xiii. 1.

FOR HE IS THE MINISTER OF GOD TO THEE FOR GOOD.

THE foregoing chapter comprises what has been called St. Paul's ethics; this exhibits a view of his politics. In the former, he closes his prescription of social duties with the exhortation, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." He then passes, by a natural transition, to consider the relation which the Christian sustains to the civil magistracy, in which alone on earth the power is vested of avenging social wrongs. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of

God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same, for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake."

The frequency of such maxims in the New Testament, as a part of the code of Christian morals, is, at least, remarkable. The Apostle, in his directions to Titus, whom he had left in the Island of Crete to superintend the newly-planted churches, instructs him specially to "put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and to obey magistrates." And St. Peter, writing to the whole company of converts scattered throughout the several provinces, exhorts them thus: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers and for the praise of them that do well." We find this teaching confirmed by that of the Savior. When tempted by

some of his enemies with the question, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or no?"—shall we give or shall we not give?—his safe yet significant reply was, "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." And yet, again, when he was arraigned before Pontius Pilate, and was reminded of his power either to liberate or to crucify him, he replied, "Thou couldst have had no power over me, except it had been given thee from above."

From such teaching as this, illustrated as it was by his own practical commentary living and dying, the first teachers of Christianity might well conclude, that, in enforcing the duty of civil obedience, they were only echoing the precepts of their Divine Master. The force and value of such instruction are enhanced to our minds by the knowledge of the circumstances under which it was given. The early church lay under the peculiar suspicion of being hostile to the civil magistracy. The Jews, who formed a large part of the first converts to Christianity, had been religiously taught that the sceptre belonged to the issue of David's line, and that any other king than a child of Abraham must be a usurper. An easy inference from such principles would be, that resistance to the political powers was an act of devotion to God, and rebellion was only heroic piety. And these principles

were not, in fact, without their fruit. About fifteen years before the beginning of the Savior's ministry; there had arisen, in Palestine; an impostor, called Judas of Galilee; who maintained that it was unlawful to render tribute to the usurping Roman government; and claimed for his system, a spirituality which set it aloof from all political inquisition or control. His system was soon exploded, and the term "Galilean" became a name of suspicion and reproach. When, therefore, Jesus Christ came forth from Galilee, proclaiming a new and spiritual kingdom, it was natural that he should incur the odium attached to this association of facts, and be mistaken for an abettor of the old political heresy. This circumstance explains the question touching the tribute money; and the reason of the common suspicion of his character and designs. Now, when we are informed that the title of Galileans was commonly applied to the early Christians, even to the time of the emperor Julian, thus identifying them with the disciples of a religious school which refused subjection to every political power; we can perceive the peculiar pertinence of the Apostolic injunctions of civil obedience. Indeed, it was deemed so essential to the reputation, as well as the truth of Christianity, that it should not be confounded with the profane and revolutionary scheme which it was accused of perpetu-

ating; that we find the early apologists for Christianity levelling some of their strongest refutations against the specific charge of its seditious tendency.*

To estimate more fully the force of this Apostolic teaching; we are to bear in mind that the primitive disciples lay under peculiar provocations to resist the arm of secular authority. The infant church was every where persecuted and cast out as an offence; until martyrdom grew to be the Christian's inevitable cross, as it was deemed likewise the pledge of his covenanted crown. It was evidently, in such a state of things, that St. Peter wrote his first Epistle; and it is equally well known, that the Christians at Rome, to whom our text was addressed, were at that moment living under the dominion of a monarch the most profligate and tyrannical—in whose nostrils the savor of Christianity was an intolerable offence. Under these circumstances, such injunctions as we have cited are, to say the least, remarkable; and when we find them so implicitly urged, we naturally look for their grounds. If the practice be so indispensably pious, its principle should be a part of the theory of piety. And we find that St. Paul makes it so. The duty of civil submission is made at once to rest on a religious dogma. "He is the minister of God to thee."

* V. Chrysostom, Hom. on Rom. 13.

“Wherefore, ye must needs be subject not only for wrath but for conscience sake.” Civil obedience, and whatsoever form of duty to the state, is a religious tribute to Heaven, because God ministers in the person of the magistrate. As this declaration involves a general principle, it has lost none of its value or solidity by time. Whatever truth it had as a general principle, it will constantly retain, till human magistracy shall cease. I ask your attention while I make this truth the subject of my discourse.

“He is the minister of God to thee,” says the text, and “the powers that be are ordained of God,” says the context.

The word “ordained” denotes a specific appointment; a formal plan and institute; something deliberately invented and ratified. Commentators agree in assigning this as the true sense of the term. I, therefore, assume it as the admitted meaning of Scripture, that civil government is a special divine appointment; that God rules in and by the magistrate;—rules not in the way of tolerance alone; not as he permits the promiscuous deeds of men, good and bad, wise and foolish, freely acting out their own voluntariness; not by merely withholding his interference; but rather by solemn institution and a constant decree. This is the religious view of civil government. No studious

reader of the Scriptures will deny that they present this view in marked and luminous prominence. I am quite aware, indeed, that the principle I have just enunciated is, even when not formally opposed, often deemed obsolete. It has long been classed with the errors that have seethed in the minds of men for a time, shaken the structure of society, and then been thrown out and trodden under foot. In discussing it afresh, therefore, I may seem to grope among the ashes of an extinct controversy, in the vain experiment of kindling some glow of their old volcanic heat.

But the period is past for this question of government to convulse the nations, as in former days. Time has already travailed with this controversy, and the great principle of human freedom which it brought to light was a birth for many generations. Yet, if the proposition I have laid down be scriptural, then, as involving a religious element, it must live and impart life.

My object is, to have it recognized as a vital power in human organizations; and specially to see it admitted as legitimate in civil government. "Let God be true, though every man be a liar."

In the following remarks, I shall first sketch the history of this religious view of government, as connected with the theories of polity in modern times; and then show how far, and for what reasons, it should enter into our own.

Long after the primitive times of Christianity, the maxim, that the magistracy was divinely appointed, was the settled basis of Christian governments. For a course of ages, this maxim was the bulwark of the papal supremacy; deemed impregnable, and therefore unassailed. Every monarch rested his sceptre on the platform of divine right. But when Luther hurled his iron gauntlet against the doors of the Vatican, the defiance echoed throughout Europe, and awoke in the human breast the slumbering instinct of right. Men seemed, as for the first time, to be inspired with the solemn sense of freedom, as the prerogative of humanity. But they awoke, as from a swoon, convulsively. The new life of this conviction was a paroxysm, and they fought as well as argued for it. They not only questioned religious but civil supremacy, until there grew a protestantism of politics. In various lands, the controversy was waged with great power of reasoning, and always with violence; until, at length, the principles of human freedom, as they were called, in opposition to the divine authority of government, became, in some lands, practically established; while, in others, they could only hold a place in men's minds as theoretically justified.*

* For a more detailed history of opinion on this subject, v. "The Social Compact Exemplified," by John Quincy Adams. Providence, 1842.

The form, however, in which this angry question presented itself, was of the divine right, not of *Governments*, but of *Kings*. It is true, that the advocates of this opinion threw themselves for support upon the abstract principle that Government is a Divinity. But the meaning of their assertion was, that their King was divine; and their inference was natural that he was therefore infallible, and could do no wrong. They recognized only an administration absolute, and therefore unquestionable. Such a comprehensive conclusion was a simple charter to despotism. It created a Saturnalia for monarchs, but laid the cost on human freedom. In England, this theory was most plausibly advocated on the ground of the patriarchal institution of the Old Testament; and as the question was thus carried back to the historical origin of civil government, it was opposed on that basis. When Mr. Locke propounded the scheme which has since been familiarly known as the theory of the social compact, he declined to admit, as a historical fact, the leading statement of the opposite theory. He supposed the origin of magistracy to have been laid in a voluntary convention of the people, erecting their own government, and electing whom they would for its administration. By this theory, the magistrate held his office on an implied contract with the people that he, for

his part, should exercise his powers for their interest, while they still held the reserved right of deposition for an abuse of trust. The peculiar vice of the former theory was, that it made the magistrate unimpeachable, and took away the right of revolution; the sacred *ultima ratio* of down-trodden humanity.* But, on the other hand, the theory of the social compact, congenial as it is found in practice with human progress, had more than one vicious element. In the first place, it was historically untrue. It grounded itself on a supposed state of facts which never existed. Probably no civil government was ever originated by a voluntary convention of all without exception who were to be its subjects.† It is quite plain, at least, that the primitive history of the race gives no countenance to such an explanation. If we come down one step this side of the flood, when the world was distributed by Noah among his three sons; the history of governments would rather seem to bear out the

* "Sir Robert Filmer did not perceive that, by the laws of nature and of God, every individual human being is born with *rights* which no individual, or combination of individuals, can take away; that all exercise of human authority must be under the limitation of right and wrong."—*J. Q. Adams's Social Compact*, p. 24.

† "In the formation of any social compact by the people, we may assume it as a first principle that the individuals covenanting for the whole can never amount to more than one in five of the whole."—*Id.* p. 9.

theory of Hobbes, (who, infidel though he was, stumbled into coincidence with Scripture;) that magistracy was laid in conquest; the first great government being that of Nimrod, "a mighty man"; that is, a conqueror; who laid the foundation of Babel. (Gen. x.) If we descend another step, we find the *Patriarchal* government decreed in the call of Abraham; and, still lower down, the legitimate and full-formed Theocracy. As a mere theory, then, the social compact had no historical basis. This, indeed, is, after all, a question of no practical moment; since the Scriptures themselves do not insist upon the mode of government, as at all affecting its authority. When our text was written, there were represented, among the several nations of the earth, though enfolded in the great Roman despotism, all the various forms of civil polity. Hence it was not necessary to any theory to prove its conformity to the original pattern of government, since the form of administration was unimportant to the practical issue, while the attempt to do so in a way which rejected the scriptural history seemed like a departure from truth; and shed, upon the theory of the social compact, a complexion of irreligion.

Its antisciptural character is exposed in another point; for it represents the body of the people as the grand fountain of authority. From them, the magis-

trate receives, by election, the office which they have alone instituted ; to them, he is solely responsible ; and, according to the familiar maxim of politics, he is *the servant of the people*. Now here is a literal contradiction of the religious maxim, "*he is the minister of God ;*" holding an office whose authority man did not create ; responsible reverently, and supremely, to the divine Ordainer of magistrates. The minister of God, indeed, *to thee, for thee, the people, and for thy good*, but not *of thee, nor from thee* ; for that were atheism. The mode of appointment is one thing, while the authority of the administration is another. "The apostle refers," says St. Chrysostom,* not "to persons, but to powers." This is not an unmeaning distinction. It is illustrated as a *real* thing in the history of the Theocracy itself, in which the Israelites actually gave their formal consent to the political administration of their affairs by Jehovah. (Ex. xix.) So that the Theocracy was elective, yet was it never alleged that the election constituted its essential divine authority. Forgetting or slighting this distinction between the source of authority and the power of appointment, the theory of the social compact seemed to alienate religion, and to stand alone, in perfect human sufficiency. It was *negatively* atheistic, and it thus

* Homily on Romans.

invited the practice of atheism. Now, if there be any such thing as the organic relation of a nation to the great Governor of the world,—if God be, in any valid and available sense, the Ruler of nations,—this omission to recognize him, or to make much of him, in the essential theory of government, was a fearful, if not a fatal, oversight. The reason of this omission doubtless was, that the philosophy of the day, and specially of Mr. Locke himself, had no place for the idea of an organic unity in the state. Essentially the philosophy of materialism, it made society an aggregate, not a unit. The nation was a mere conglomerate, cemented externally; not an organized product, having an interior diffused life of its own, working its own growth and ripeness, and dependent, all the while, in its organic capacity, upon the great Being who was the Founder of nations no less than the Creator of man. Its theory of social life was a pure unmitigated individualism. Wherever the philosophy of materialism spread, drawing all its ideas from the outward, and making the senses the source of last appeal, *there* spread congenially the theory of the social compact. It was infidelity's great battering-ram, with which she shattered the outmost bulwarks of society, even as, by the other weapons of that philosophy, she sapped the strong holds of social defence, the church, and the

family. Hence the remark of an affectionate disciple of that school, of some of the Parisians, just before the breaking out of the French Revolution, that they were “wonderfully enlightened, and spoke like men who had read Locke.”

Thus, then, did these two great theories of national polity stand side by side before the world; the one making every thing of the magistrate, even up to divinity; and nothing—or nothing valuable—of man; the other exalting the mass of individuals to a supremacy, that seemed to make all other sovereignty an encumbrance to be superseded.

While, in its common application, the theory of divine right led to an irreclaimable despotism; irreclaimable because it seemed to bear the awful signature of Heaven; so, in strictness of reason, the theory of the social compact, resolving all law into the majority of mere wills, leaving the minority without remedy or appeal of wrong; confounded authority with numbers and brute force; and erected a despotism no less unmitigated than the other, and far less reverend because atheistic.* Between these two systems, the world was called to decide—the divine right, and the

* “The theory of a social contract, though somewhat plausible at first view, does not bear the test of accurate examination; and is rarely admitted at the present day, by competent judges.”—A. H. EVERETT, *Life J. J. Rousseau*, *N. Am. Rev.*, July, 1822.

popular right of civil government. It seemed to be taken for granted that the two had no points of contact, and could never coalesce; and the decision of the nations was, therefore, absolutely for one or the other. The world knows how France cast her vote for the social theory, as it was developed by the French expounders of Mr. Locke; the disciple, as usual, going beyond his master, though not in advance of his master's principles. France adopted the popular principle to the extent of its most ruthless radicalism. The issue of the experiment is sufficiently notorious. Our own nation has made election, likewise, of the same theory, as the basis of its polity; though, with a mitigation of its ferocity, and with conservative checks. But the great question is; are these checks sufficient? Is there not the same capacity for mischief, in our modified system, as in its simpler forms? And what shall prevent the development of its potential evil? What are the bands of government? Now, in answer to these questions, the theory of the social compact points to the enlightened self-interest of the people, the inborn love of order, and the conscientious sense of duty to the nation. Are these sufficient to conserve the government?—is the grand world-problem of the present century. When self-interest fails to be enlightened, and degenerates into passionate sel-

fishness ; or, when varying self-interests refuse to accommodate each other, where is the bond of union ? “In the inbred love of order ;” says the theory. But is the love of order strong enough to overpower selfishness ? If not, where again is the bond ? “In the conscience of the people ;” is the final answer of the theory. And, in truth, we need look no farther. We know that the great Maker of us all has given to the moral sense a position, in our natures, of *supremacy*. In the scale of human attributes, conscience was evidently designed for the governing rank. It is the regal faculty of the soul. If we secure its enlightened protection, we secure all besides ; love of order, and the largest wisdom of self-interest. We bind all other bonds. But conscience herself needs a guide and a rule. She can only see the way, not shape it for herself ;—follow the rule, not invent it. Conscience is an eye, not an infallible instinct. She does not instruct, but is instructed. The whole great question, then, is resolved into this, Does the social theory supply the necessary helps and incentives to conscience for the conservation of the nation ? According to that theory, government is only a mutual contract,—a contract from which, on violation of its conditions, either party may recede. Each party is thus the arbiter of its own cause, and acts on its own inde-

pendence of the other, both in its judgment and its execution. Now, in a system of such broad license, so easily degenerating into licentiousness, it is plain that conscience needs the aid of the most stringent and solemn sanctions. If the government be only a contract between equals, then the duty of conscience is simply the duty between men as individuals; the duty of abiding by the stipulations of a bargain. The relation between the government and the governed becomes a purely commercial one. Allegiance—fealty—if there be such words in its vocabulary, is a mere mercantile virtue, the principle of the counting-house and the exchange. The same constraint, and no more, which holds a citizen in honor and honesty to his neighbor, would forbid him to rebel against the state. Now is there not danger that, in the proverbial fluctuations of commercial virtue, the political conscience of the people, floating on that tide, may be tossed and foundered? When we remember the tendencies of a commercial age to accumulate not always with strict reference to a moral law, and that the mercantile conscience rests often on the sense of interest or pride; when we think of the evasions of right that often grow into mercantile usages; when we bear in mind, finally, how infectiously this moral deterioration may spread itself to other relations of life, lowering

the standard of moral right, does it not seem that our great political experiment rests on a basis too narrow for its top? We do injustice to the great cause of human rights, we do injustice to the social theory itself, when we allow it to resolve all the obligations of citizenship into a merely social duty; for that is a duty which belongs only to *the second table of the great moral law*, and, by resting upon it, the social theory divorces itself from the *yet higher sanctions of the first table*. It urges only our obligations to our neighbor, and shuts out the more exalted, solemn sense of duty to God.

Now, remember that the experiment of *self-government*, as we are fond of describing our polity, is, to say the least, an awful experiment for fallen man. Nay, the phrase itself, if taken in its absoluteness, is impious and fearful. But, supposing it to mean only so much as is consistent with the recognition of some sort of law higher than human enactment, as, indeed, the supposition of a popular conscience implies; still the experiment is momentous; and we peril its great issues, and, in them, we peril the well-being of humanity at large, when we trust them to a national conscience supported only on one side. The constant tendency of self-government is for man to become his own standard. There is to him, then, nothing be-

yond what he himself creates. Truth resolves itself to his mind into mere opinion. His law is self-will, and then his virtue—is *an accident*.*

It is not safe, thus to reduce the quality of our political obligations; to make the moral element of duty exclusive; banishing the religious element from our system. It is not safe, simply because it is not religious. God will not approve a nation which is irreligious on system, and dutiful only from a conscientiousness which may be based on pride or interest. And if he *fail* to approve, then a woe betides her grandeur. Her prowess and distinction are only a more attractive mark for the destroyer when her fated day shall come. "Hear now this," says the prophet,

* This subject reminds me of a conversation with the late Dr. Channing, about seven years ago, on the island of Rhode Island, in which he spoke at large, through the greater part of a summer afternoon, of the principles and prospects of the Republic. It was the period of *repudiation*.

Although, upon the whole, he declared himself hopeful for the country, yet he confessed, with much solemnity of manner, that the growing disregard of mercantile virtue, as betokened by repeated instances of public and private defalcation, was an omen full of discouragement, and that, without a remedy, the nation would be lost. There have since been signs of a return of the "popular conscience" to a more healthy state. But it may be fairly questioned how much of this improvement proceeds from the mere pride of character excited by indignant reproaches from abroad, or from a removal of the commercial embarrassments and of the temptation to "repudiate." Such shocks can be honorably and repeatedly borne only by a principle both deeper and higher than the sense of reputation.

speaking of a Heaven-despising nation, "these two things shall come to thee in a moment, in our day; the loss of children, and widowhood. They shall come upon thee in their perfection. For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness; thou hast said, '*there is no overseer.*' Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thy heart, *I am, and none else besides me.* Therefore shall evil come upon thee, and thou shalt not know from whence it riseth; and mischief shall fall upon thee; thou shalt not be able to put it off." By infusing into our political system the religious element, we reinforce the sanctions of conscience; we exalt the sentiment of national duty, from a cool-blooded calculation of interest, into a reverential affection. We bring the whole stress of the divine law to conserve the republic. We constrain order and peace, not only by the sense of mutual right among equals, but by the noble convictions of duty to God. Allegiance to the state is then fealty to Heaven, and patriotism, then, looks *upwards* in its devotion, and its countenance reflects a heavenly light. The social theory must borrow, from the old patriarchal, its vital element. It must invoke a "Divinity to hedge its king." It must adopt, lovingly and in faith, the confessed principle of the Bible, that the magistracy is divine. Then will our

political theory stand forth in symmetry and compactness, upheld by a great national conscience which regards, not only the contract of honor between the people and the magistrate, but the covenant of loyalty to the institution of Heaven.*

In saying thus much, I ought to notice an objection which is commonly urged, and as commonly deemed fatal to the principle for which I speak. It is asked, Does not the theory of the divine right result, unavoidably, in the doctrine of passive obedience to tyranny; and would not resistance to the magistrate, under any circumstances, be a virtual crime against God? To this objection I might reply, by saying, that, as the idea of authority does not necessarily include infallibility, so, neither does it follow that, because authority is divine, it is, therefore, unlimited. A delegated supremacy may be absolute in its sphere, and yet its sphere be restricted by definite and even narrow bounds. But, not to dwell upon distinctions which may seem too abstract, I would meet the objection by a familiar analogy. Besides the divine appointment of civil magistracy, there is another human

* "The principle of the Protestant Reformation was to deny, not that human government was of divine institution, but that implicit belief and obedience was due to the commandments of men."—J. Q. ADAMS, *Soc. Comp.*, p. 21.

institution which stands forth on the same authority. I mean, the domestic institution. The family, no less than the state, is of divine origin. Filial obedience is a duty of piety towards God. The parent is the Heaven-appointed master of the family,—the child, a Heaven-obliged subject. The duty of the one is implicit, and the authority of the other is absolute. But it does not follow that either is unlimited. All persons admit that there may be emergencies which justify filial disobedience, in which “the first commandment with promise,” as it is called, “Honor thy father and mother,” may be set aside; and the child may stand up before his human parent and assert his independence as a child of God. Without attempting to specify the reasons which would warrant such an exception, I may say, what will be generally admitted, that the child may transgress the parental rule only when his obedience would involve the violation of a higher law. When submission to the parent is identical with disobedience to God, the filial duty deceases. The human being rises above the domestic. His insubordination to man is, then, simple allegiance to God. If we transfer this reasoning to the case of civil obedience, the objection to the theory of the divine authority of government is sufficiently met. That theory does not deny the moral propriety of dis-

obedience, under all circumstances. On the contrary, it may recognize the maxim of the early Christian martyr Polycarp, "giving honor to potentates, but not in contradiction of religion." It will justify rebellion when conformity would be a crime. It thrusts aside minor obligations, to save those which are fundamental. It deposes the delegated authority, in order to make way for the supreme. It exalts the human, above the national; and makes rebellion not only conceivably justifiable, but even dutiful. The right of revolution is, then, literally a sacred thing; because it is obedience to the highest divinity of government.

If it be asked, "Where then lies the superiority, in this respect, of this theory over that of the social compact;" I answer, that the latter recognizes rebellion as one of its legitimate consequences. As it has been interpreted, at home as well as in France, it makes revolution almost the rule of political life, and obedience its constrained exception; whereas, the scriptural theory exalts the duty of obedience, pregnant as it is with reverence and self-denial, and the unsolicited love of patriotism, into the noble rule of a beautiful life; and it makes the act of revolution the rare and sublime exception, in which conscience herself does but tread down the earthly government that she may rise in nobler allegiance to the divine. While it

invests the magistrate with the transferred dignity of Heaven, it holds him stringently to his duty, by a tie that is thus twofold,—divine, as well as human.

There would seem, then, to be a strong reason why the offcast principle of a divine magistracy in the state should be restored to its due place in the minds of men. The theory of the social compact, forgetful, as it has always been, of religion, may even yet be grafted with this great religious truth of politics. And it is just matter of holy thanks that the rising up of a better style of philosophy is preparing the age for its admission.

The material philosophy had no place for the idea of a spiritual, organic unity of the state, aside from and above the mere assemblage of men, and women, and children. It gave no credit to general ideas. It believed nothing but the senses; and, as it could not see nor hear an abstraction, it refused the conception of a spiritual institution in any other than an accommodated sense. It regarded society not as a corporate unity so much as a loose juxtaposition of individuals. Being essentially analytical, it resolved all things into their elements; but, following only the rule of the senses, it carried its analysis no farther than material tests would go. Hence, in government, the people were *all*; the state was only a fictitious

name for the people in action. It was not possible, in such a system, to find a vacant niche for the abstract magistracy as a perpetual institution of God. Its grand negation of religion was, therefore, essential to its whole theory of government. Now, as this nation has felt obliged, in adopting the social theory, to stop short of its radical extreme, and refuse some of its practical absurdities, why may it not rectify its vital fault by the infusion of a more wholesome religious philosophy?

That better philosophy would teach us, that society is but the *complete form of human nature*; that man, as an individual, is not the whole of humanity; that the state is a positive subsistence; the magistracy the perpetual regency of Heaven for the nation's weal. If it be asked, "what influence could be exerted upon the national character and destiny by such a mere abstract notion"? I answer, the same influence that abstractions have universally upon the character of men and of society; a mastering influence; unconscious, but vital, pervading and plastic; the same influence that faith has in the soul, regenerating it; or that life has in the body, resisting or healing disease. Abstractions are the source of power; as meditation is the mother of all voluntary life. We have no safety for our institutions, even now, but in the conservative

power of abstract truth operating on the conscience of our citizens. The principle before us is but a new power of truth, acting in the same way, to the same end.

But let us now proceed to develope, more at large, the bearings of this view upon the powers of government.

Theoretically, the aim of government is the conservation of human rights; and I know of no better description of those rights than that which is conveyed by our Declaration of Independence in the order of "*life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.*" Government is the conservator of all these. It is the minister of God to thee for this good. As God's servant, then, in the first place, it is evident that the magistrate may hold a right over human life which could not belong to individuals, and which no authority less than divine could bestow. On the principle of the social compact, capital punishment, even for the greater security of life, is a plain aggression upon individual rights. Rousseau himself, with other warm advocates of that theory, admitted that, as the authority of the magistrate was derived from the people, it could rise no higher than theirs; and, since no man has a right to deprive himself of life, he cannot rightfully empower his servant to do it. Hence capital punishment is

cruelly absurd. On the same theory of individualism, regarding man as all, and the government as his mere creature, rests much of the opposition to capital punishment in our time. Religion has, in some quarters, taken the almost exclusive form of sympathy for human suffering; as if every duty to God were fulfilled in philanthropy; while philanthropy, without the sanctions of piety and a spiritual mind, inevitably fails to contemplate the lasting interests of man; and narrows itself down to his temporal comfort alone. The material grows to supersede the abstract. The tangible present outvies the spiritual eternal. Hence, with our commiseration for the suffering criminal, there is scarcely enough of filial lamentation for the outraged state. We sing, as the psalmist did, "of mercy," but not "of judgment." And so, to the view of that philosophy which identifies the government with the people, capital punishment is but a bloody, popular revenge. But the scriptural principle that the magistracy is from God, bearing a sword not in vain, adjusts the difficulties of this great question; exalts the magistrate above the man, and above the people; invests him with the serene and passionless majesty of law; and makes him the mouth-piece and executor of divinity, with a sword, "bathed," as the prophet says, "in Heaven." (Is. xxxiv. 5.)

Secondly. Again,—since government is the divine conservator of liberty, as well as of life, and, for this end, bears a sword, the principle of our text shows the propriety of defensive war. This position is likewise, in our time, much controverted; and, on the same grounds, as capital punishment. Separating philosophy from its indispensable ingredient of piety, which, in the New Testament, are always fused and commingled, exalting the Christian maxims for private conduct, and discarding the Christian doctrine of government, the non-resistant denounces, with a truculent eloquence, even the strictest self-defence, and gives his opponent no peace till the whole field of philanthropy is laid waste, and philanthropy herself sometimes wounded and slain.

It is so difficult, however, to dislodge, from human minds and hearts, the conviction that roots itself in both mind and heart, of the moral propriety of national and home defence, that it is safe to leave this question to the generous and just instincts of mankind.* It is enough for my purpose to say, that the scriptural

* In some recent discourses by the Rev. President Wayland, on the duty of "civil obedience," the right of national defence is, by this profound writer, distinctly maintained, although on a different ground from that assumed in this discourse. The fact is the more worthy of note because the authority of this, as well as of other distinguished names, has been erroneously brought to support the theory of a total non-resistance.

idea of human government strongly reinforces those instincts, and impresses it as the high function of the magistrate to defend the nation with sword as well as shield. "If my kingdom were of this world," said the Savior, "then would my servants fight." (Jno. xviii. 30.)*

Thirdly. Again,—not only for the security of life and liberty, but for ensuring the pursuit of "happiness," says our Declaration of Independence, was government ordained. And here the subject expands into a wide field. Important questions meet us at the opening. What is meant by the "pursuit of happiness"? Is it temporal enjoyment, or spiritual and eternal? Is it sensual pleasure, or mental cultivation? How far does the authority of government extend? Can it prescribe and enforce the mode, and must it supply the means, of this pursuit, or shall it leave to each person the freedom to choose and act as he deems best for his happiness? Now the philos-

* The use of this text from St. John, in the application which I have made of it in this discourse and elsewhere, has been objected to. It is evident, however, that the meaning which I have thus ascribed to our Savior's words, is in entire harmony with the scriptural theory of civil government, even if it may not be said to grow out necessarily from that theory. In none of the commentaries which I have consulted, have I found any thing contradictory to this interpretation, while the opinion of the late Dr. Arnold is explicitly in its favor. V. *Arnold's Lectures on Modern His. Append. to Inaug: Lec.*

ophy of individualism might decide these questions in one way, while the theory of the Bible would determine them otherwise. They are so replete with the material for discussion, that, in this connexion, I can only glance along their prominent points. By the doctrine of the Scriptures, civil government was divinely instituted for human good ; and, by the doctrine of our Declaration of Independence, the highest good of life and liberty is "the pursuit of happiness." And here meets us the first question,—what is the happiness thus denoted ? With the open Bible before us, and the no less open book of human life, it were useless to labor the point. As an intelligent being, man's truest happiness, lies in the præminence of his reason over his senses ; as a moral being, in the supremacy of his conscience over both ; and, as an immortal creature, in his fitness for that eternal state, to which this life is only the gymnasium. If we receive the true sense of the language, therefore, the grand object of civil government is, the completion of our nature in all the qualifications for its whole everlasting life : and this great work involves, of necessity, the *education of the people*, not only intellectually, but morally and religiously. Can any thing less be inferred from the divine institution of civil government, than that its most solemn care should be for the mental and religious advancement of the commonwealth ?

On this point, we are not without the authority of wise men, and masters in political science. Aristotle, with such religion as he had, maintained that, in the education of the citizen, the pursuit of "truth and beauty," by which he intended to describe all the objects of man's higher faculties, was to be preferred to the study of those things which are merely "necessary or useful."* And Mr. Burke has said that "religion is so far, in my opinion, from being out of the province of a Christian magistrate, that it is, and it ought to be, not only his care, but the principal thing in his care; because it is one of the great bonds of human society, and its object the supreme good, the ultimate end and object of man himself."†

But our own practice has forestalled all theoretic objection to this view. If not in our general government, yet in our state administrations, the education of the citizen is recognized as one of their functions, and that education is made to embrace, as one of its indispensable branches, the teaching of Christian morality.

We have thus decided, that the highest good, the true happiness, of the citizen, is his moral, as well as his mental, advancement. We have answered a great

* Aristot. Pol. B. 4. C. 14.

† Works, Vol. 5. p. 369.

question, and our answer is, thus far; in accordance with the religious theory of civil government.

But another suggestion arises; How far does the power of government extend? Must it leave each citizen to act out his separate individuality; to pursue his happiness according to his own views of happiness, and of its method; or shall government prescribe the mode, as well as point out the end? Shall it *enforce* its prescriptions with authority, and bind the whole nation to a systematic education, in both mind and morals; in religion, no less than in learning? These are questions which our practice has not fully solved; but whose answer may be inferred from our text. "He is the minister of God to thee for good." It would reasonably appear to belong to such an office, not to leave the highest good to the pursuit of each separate citizen; but to mark out the path of pursuit, and lead him to engage in it.

The *divinity* of government empowers it to stand up in advance of the people; and to direct them in whatsoever affects their best interests. It is the state's *organic judgment and will, its eye and hand*, to secure for the state, by both its wisdom and its power, the highest weal of man. It should, therefore, constrain the whole education of the people, and specially enforce the sober, solemn teachings of religion. On this

point, unless I mistake, our national practice needs a corrective. It has been remarked, of the two great states of ancient times, that Roman education was a part of the government; and the Grecian government a part of its education.* In this respect, our own system bears an evident resemblance to the Grecian. Our polity is the embodiment of our philosophy; and our philosophy is the expression of our national habits and training. But, in the Grecian education, we discover two distinct methods, depending, for their vitality and power, on different principles. The Spartan method was made effective by the pervading principle of control; the Athenian drew its efficiency from incitement. The former was a system of restraint; the latter, of development.

A glance at our national peculiarities shows how nearly kindred they are to the Athenian characteristics. We are a commercial people as well as they; restless, busy and enterprising; fathoming all depths; measuring all distances; and testing all the powers of nature and art. Our education, instead of resting on the principle of restraint, aims supremely at successful *effort*. We plant a ladder at every post of honor. We widen the paths of social distinction. We lay open the arena of political strife, and give the crown to the

* Maurice's Lectures on Nat. Education, Lec. 1.

best wrestler. The life of our education is incitement ; its result is development. It is an education which makes much of man, *the individual*. It grows naturally from our theory of individualism. It is admirably adapted both to stimulate and indulge the energies of an energetic people. But the education of simple development is not the education for fallen man. It is based upon a grand fallacy of theology and of human nature. If all the human attributes were pure and virtuous ; if the germ of man's spiritual character had no worm of evil gnawing its vitality ; if all that is necessary were, merely to give Heaven's light and warmth to powers whose natural growth is heavenward ; this would be unquestionably the best education. It would be the training of Heaven itself. But since the fall has depraved us, and our faculties and affections have suffered a bias from that shock, no experiment could be more unwise than an education of simple incitement. Even if we aimed to develop only the better parts of human nature, leaving its perversities untouched ; yet life is full enough of unholy stimulants, and the insurgent instincts of wickedness are strong enough of themselves to develop all the evil of our natures at an equal pace, to say the least, with our virtues. That is the only wise training which nurtures the tardy good, and fetters the

swift evil, of our humanity. The radical want of our educational system is that of restraint.

And this is no second-rate influence. It is the only mould of a really heroic character. All the noblest attributes of man are laid in his control of his own nature. Few men were ever self-denying, who had not been trained to denial in their childhood. The system of development may produce characters of marked individuality; of surpassing energy; of high mental or physical prowess. It may engender independence of feeling, and impatience of tyranny, and a vaulting ambition, and the jealous pride of self-respect. But, in all this, if it be exclusive, it only insulates each man, by strengthening his biases, making him less like his neighbor, and developing his peculiarities into offensive singularities. He is more self-indulgent, less social, less fitted for the accommodation of society, less considerate of the common interest, less observant of law, and a worse citizen. His moral qualities, the source of all motive-power, prone to evil, and, by this system, unhindered, must inevitably bend his other energies, with all their trained strength of development, to a course of wayward indulgence and inveterate self-will.

If this be not our present character, its germinant signs may be detected in all the departments of social

influence and training ; from the nursery, through the schoolhouse and the college, up to the Commonwealth. There is a premature development of self-will, an early pride, a jealous insubordination, a want of reverence for authority, which are neither wholesome nor encouraging. What their finished work may be on the national character, and through how many generations these qualities will run, gathering force and aggravation before they explode the corporate unity of the nation, is foreign to my purpose to forecast. We have not yet realized it ; perhaps, because we have not survived the influences of an education into which discipline was allowed to enter. But let the future be wary and watchful for these consequences. Be it ours to obviate the cause. The plain remedy is found in the principle of restraint, exerted upon the will and the propensities of the citizen, from his childhood, upwards. It is a cogent and wholesome power. It teaches self-denial ; the love of order and of law ; filial reverence to authority ; and that submission which, as Bishop Berkeley says, is “ the cement of society.”* It curbs the salient propensities ; strikes off offensive peculiarities ; engenders the sympathy of a common life ; and, by directing all wills to one central authority, it creates a national unity and compactness, which

* Minute Philosopher :— *Works*, Vol. II, p. 14.

is not only proof against invasion, but an equal preventive of insurrection. It implies the true, ancient sentiment, of patriotism "for our altars and our hearths;" a sentiment that halts on one foot when you take away its religious element, and leave no altars; or, what is the same thing, no reverence for their divinity. It is but half a patriotism, at last. If the principle of restraint were exclusive, or strongly paramount, in our education, I admit that it would produce only the mechanical uniformity of Spartan character, or the stolid, impregnable hardness of the Russian. But, when combined with the system of development, gathering all the energies of individual character, as they are brought into lively play by incitement; and banding them together by a common subordination to law and order; and thus adding to the sum of individual energies *the power of a corporate life*, it would seem to present the theory of a perfect national education. There would seem to be no pitch of grandeur which we may not reasonably aspire to, and safely reach. It is vain, in our day, to ground this rule of restraint on any other than a religious basis. This want of our system is philosophically met by the scriptural theory of government, and by nothing else.

Let government be regarded as a religious institution, and its right and duty will be at once acknowl-

edged, of guiding the nation in the pursuit of its highest happiness, both by *instruction* and by *restraint*, with prayer and faith. I know how liable the mingling of religion with politics is to be charged with sectarianism. But I know, besides, that the charge comes most impatiently from the spirit of religious indifference, which is itself the most unwholesome sectarianism; never charitable, never kind; which would extinguish all earnestness that is in advance of itself, and tolerate nothing but negation. Still, if our national experiment is ever to prosper, the principle must yet triumph, that the citizen shall obey the magistrate, "not only for wrath, but for conscience sake," because "he is the minister of God to thee for good."

But it is time to close a discussion, which is important and fruitful enough for a volume. In addressing, however, the chief magistrate and his associates in the legislative and executive departments of the Commonwealth, I cannot conclude my discourse without suggesting the practical bearing of our subject upon them and their office. At first view, it may seem to exalt them higher than popular jealousy will tolerate. And it does, indeed, confer a dignity, but a dignity so solemn and full of responsibility, that one may well bid himself "beware with what intent he touches that holy thing." By the light of the truth,

we have considered how does your station seem to be set above the reach of bribery and indirection; how far away from the profane ambition of mere office-seeking. Yet, the principle of our text is as strong a curb to official prerogative as to popular encroachment. It no more makes license the privilege of government, than it pronounces the popular whim to be its origin. On the contrary, its proper influence is to hold the magistrate by the most impressive considerations that can affect the conscience of man. If it shows him how near his office is to heaven, it should only make him feel how pure his motives ought to be, and to what a high pattern of rectitude he should conform himself. He ought to feel that *he is representing the divine government of human affairs*. If this view were cordially entertained, would it not deepen his sense of responsibility to Heaven, and his solicitude for the true interests of the Commonwealth? This is the single practical inference which I take the liberty of suggesting. The purpose of your assembling together from your separate homes is, to establish the laws of the Commonwealth. Yours may well be called the highest department of government. Legislation has a divinity all its own. It is the voice of the state's wisdom; the form of her conscience; the mould of her character. It is the divine supremacy of the rational

over the outward. It is an address from God's mind to man's. It is a creative power. How soberly and conscientiously should you engage in the high vocation ! Suffer me, then, in presenting to you the respectful greeting which the occasion warrants, to express the prayerful wish, that your deliberations may be so guided by the purity and wisdom that are from above, as to demonstrate that you are "the ministers of God"; and so followed by advantage to the Commonwealth, as to prove that you are ministers "to us for good."





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